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SUBJECT: Belarus: Radioactive Metal Found

¶1. Independent newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda reported on May 30 that Minsk police investigating fraud searched scrap metal collection station Number 29 and found 6.5 tons of unregistered scrap metal. Police told the paper an Armenian citizen was the sole worker at the station and that the people who delivered the metal gave false names. Police called in the Ministry of Emergency Situations to measure the metal for radiation. One batch of 55 kilograms brass pipes, each being 25 mm in diameter and 1.2 meters in length, was found to measure from 0.5 to 90 microsieverts per hour, or up to 450 times the normal local level of 0.2 ms/hour.

¶2. The Ministry of Emergency Situations delivered the pipes to a special facility near Sosny, where they were buried in a concrete box. [Note: Sosny, outside Minsk, is home to Belarus' inactive research reactor.] Two hours later they again measured the radiation levels at the scrap metal site, and found they had returned to normal.

¶3. A Ministry of Emergency Situations' spokesman told Komsomolskaya Pravda they do not know where the pipes came from, but assume from the Chernobyl area. He added that it is not uncommon for his ministry to find radioactive items in Belarus. In 2003 there were two such cases, in 2004 one, and in 2005 six instances. This was the first such incident in 2006.

¶4. Comment: Post sees nothing to indicate any connection between these items and terrorism. Rather, this case indicates that people have seemingly easy access to the Chernobyl affected zones and are scavenging these areas for materials. It is entirely possible that such "dirty" material has been smuggled outside of Belarus.

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